

Make Ahead: Chilling and Re-Whipping Frosting

A working method for cake decorating, plus homemade confectioners sugar.

Frosting made the day before and re-whipped cold gives you a tighter, smoother texture than frosting used the day it is mixed. It is worth the extra day when the cake is going to be decorated rather than simply covered.

The Night Before

Leave the frosting in the mixer bowl. Press plastic wrap directly onto the surface of the frosting, not across the rim of the bowl. Butter picks up refrigerator odors quickly, and an air gap lets a dry skin form on top.

Refrigerate overnight. Filling holds the same way. If it is custard or curd based, press the wrap to the surface as well.

The Next Day: Temper Before the Mixer Runs

Set the bowl on the counter 45 to 60 minutes before you plan to whip. It is ready when the edge gives slightly under a spatula and the surface no longer feels hard.

Cold fat will not take air. Pushing the speed to force it only breaks the frosting and you lose the day you spent chilling it. Room temperature does the work for you.

Bringing It Back on the Mixer

- Return the bowl to the stand mixer. Start on low.
- It will look curdled and separated for the first minute or two. This is normal. Keep going.
- Move to medium and whip until it is smooth, glossy, and holds a soft peak on the beater.
- Scrape the bowl at least twice. The bottom stays colder than the sides and lags behind.

Whisk or Paddle: Choosing Your Finish

For sharp edges and glass-smooth sides, finish on the paddle at low speed for two to three minutes after the whip. The paddle presses out the air cells that show up as pinholes under a crumb coat.

Stop at the whisk when you want a lighter, softer frosting for piped borders, rosettes, and anything where mouthfeel matters more than a flat finish.

A Note on Timing

Frosting held this way also firms up faster between coats, so there is less waiting on the refrigerator between the crumb coat and the finish coat.

Homemade Confectioners Sugar

A 600 gram batch, ground from granulated sugar.

Commercial confectioners sugar is granulated sugar ground fine and cut with about three percent starch to keep it from caking in the bag. That is the whole product. Grinding your own is worth doing when the store is far, the bag is stale, or you want a corn free version.

Ingredient	Weight	Percent
Granulated sugar	582 g	97%
Cornstarch	18 g	3%
Total	600 g	100%

For the older home ratio of one tablespoon cornstarch per cup of sugar, use 576 g sugar to 24 g cornstarch. That lands at four percent and holds up slightly better in a humid kitchen.

Grinding

- Work in batches of 100 to 150 g in a high speed blender or a spice grinder. Overloading gives you sandy sugar with a layer of fine dust on top.
- Run 60 to 90 seconds, then rest 30 seconds. Friction heat makes the sugar tacky and it begins clumping on the blade.
- Let it settle a full two minutes before opening the lid or you lose a visible amount of it to the air.
- Sift through fine mesh. Return whatever stays behind to the grinder.

Substitutions and When to Skip the Starch

Tapioca or arrowroot both work at the same three percent for a corn free version. Arrowroot turns slightly slick in high moisture applications like a thin glaze, so cornstarch is the better choice there.

Skip the starch entirely if you are using the sugar the same day in a buttercream or ganache. It is only there to prevent caking in storage, and it dulls the flavor a little.

Store in a sealed jar away from the stove. Ground sugar reabsorbs moisture faster than granulated and will set up into a brick on a humid shelf.